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Israel silent on building of A-missiles

By Francis Ofner

Special correspondent of
The Christian Science Monitor

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Jerusalem

Reports from Washington that Israel produces a new missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead have again met with the customary "no comment" from official Israeli spokesmen.

But there have been developments in the past decade which point to some activities in this field and lead to the conclusion that the report is not inconsistent with other evidence here.

Israel has been in possession for some time of at least a dozen rockets capable of delivering nuclear warheads over a distance of 350 miles, it is stated in Jack Ghee's "Mirage Warplane for the World," published recently in France.

Attention has been focusing anew on this rocket following a recent New York Times report, stating that the United States and other Western intelligence sources believe that an Israeli nuclear warhead-carrying missile named Jericho is now in production here at a rate of 3-6 a month.

The same sources say Israel began developing missiles jointly with the French Dassault aircraft works before the six-day war in 1967. Following the Paris government's shift from a pro-Israeli to a pro-Arab policy with the outbreak of the six-day war, this cooperation was stopped.

In the spring of 1968, President de Gaulle ordered all Israeli equipment in France to be dismantled and sent to Israel, including 12 completed rockets and mobile firing ramps. Israel reportedly paid Dassault \$20 million for its services.

But this was not Israel's first venture in the field of rocketry. As early as 1961 the country was startled by an official announcement that a rocket called Shavit 2 had been successfully launched from a site on the beach south of Tel Aviv.

It was officially described as a "meteorological rocket" but no explanation was offered as to why its launching should have been attended by the Defense Minister and his deputy, as well as the chief of the gen-

eral staff. Nor was it disclosed what had happened to Shavit 1.

At any rate, nothing further was heard from the Shavits. But early last year, it was announced that sea-to-sea missiles of a type called Gabriel were being mounted on a dozen speedboats acquired by the Israeli Navy. These missiles, it was stated, have a range of 17 miles. No attempt was made to conceal these missiles or their launching equipment.

It has been noted here that, unlike other efforts in this field, the Gabriel was not developed by the Defense Ministry's own Military Weapons Development Authority but by the Israel aircraft industry, which is also state-owned but is mainly a civilian firm.

Concerning the New York Times report that Israel aims at a capability of destroying Cairo with atomic bombs, Israelis point out that so far their nuclear activities have been restricted to the peaceful use of atomic energy.

The whole matter blew open in 1960, when the head of the CIA charged in an interview over NBC that Israel was secretly constructing an atomic reactor of major size in the township of Dimona in the Negev Desert. He claimed Israel had "misled" the United States by dismissing the Dimona plant as a "textile factory."

Then Prime Minister Ben Gurion thereupon declared in the Knesset that the Dimona reactor was intended only for research and the peaceful uses of atomic energy.

Israeli-American exchanges on this question extended over several years and came to be known as "the delicate subject." After long American pressure, Israel eventually agreed to having the Dimona plant inspected at intervals by American scientists so as to assure that no atomic weapons were going to be made there.

Dimona was Israel's second atomic reactor. The first, located at Nahal Sorek, on the coast south of Tel Aviv, had earlier been set up with American assistance as a pure research establishment and to familiarize Israeli scientists with atomic know-how.

The Israeli Government had begun to pay attention to nuclear development at an early stage. In the early fifties an atomic energy commission was set up and its chairman was designated as the prime minister.